

THINKING METAPHYSICALLY: THE CHALLENGE TO FUNDAMENTALISM IN THE WORKS OF ROBERT A. MONROE

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An earlier, shorter version of this paper was presented at the College English Association (St. Louis, 2008) alongside a paper subtitled “Addressing Possible Anxieties of Evangelical Students about Entering the Academy.” Its author stressed the importance of assuring such students that the world of secular intellection will not destroy their beliefs and that academic rigor and Christian faith are not in binary opposition. Although both pieces fell under the rubric of spirit, teaching, and identity, they could not have been more different in one respect. The other favored a gentle, incremental coaching of Christian students away from their dogmatic beliefs; mine proposed challenging students who adhere to fundamentalist belief systems—whether religious, scientific, or both—to think about a text that is way outside their comfort zones and seems to defy probability.

Of course, the terms “evangelical” and “fundamentalist” are not complete synonyms, and I am primarily interested in the latter. Here and below, I use the term “fundamentalism” to refer to belief perseverance—a pervasive anti-intellectualism that considers only information compatible with one’s preconceptions and excludes everything else. This practice relates especially to a belief in the infallibility of the scriptures, an extreme reluctance to consider new paradigms, and an espousal of the materialistic notion that what science cannot measure does not exist.

It is hard to imagine better material for my purposes than the works of Robert A. Monroe (1915-1995), a businessman who started having spontaneous out-of-body experiences in 1958. He went on to found The Monroe Institute (a teaching/research institute in rural Virginia) and to write three books on his paranormal experiences: *Journeys Out of the Body* (JOOB), *Far Journeys* (FJ), and *Ultimate Journey* (UJ). *Journeys Out of the Body*, frequently taught at colleges and universities, might be fruitfully paired in a parapsychology or literature of science course with Joseph McMoneagle’s *Mind Trek: Exploring Consciousness, Time, and Space through Remote Viewing*, which describes the author’s experience of using remote viewing to gather information for the United States government. McMoneagle calls it “a human ability to produce information about a targeted object, person, place, or event, while being completely isolated from the target by space, time, or other forms of shielding” (*Stargate* xi). Remote viewing differs from other types of psychic functioning because it involves the reception of information “within an approved protocol,” which is that “the viewer and all the people associated with the viewer are unaware of the target material” (McMoneagle, *Mind Trek* 244; *Stargate* xi). Both Monroe and McMoneagle not only write about the cutting edge of consciousness exploration but also do so in ways that demonstrate, beyond a reasonable doubt, the objective reality of their experiences. In other words, both authors blend the anecdotal approach that characterizes metaphysical literature and some degree of the scientific rigor that characterizes laboratory-based parapsychology. If one wanted to add a purely scientific text, a good choice would be Dean Radin’s *Entangled Minds: Extrasensory Experiences in a Quantum Reality*, which synthesizes thousands of experimental studies to

argue that paranormal experiences are real, have a theoretical basis in physics, and can be replicated. However, with only one day to situate a metaphysical text among the psychological, scientific, and theological pieces in the anthology that my university compiled, *The Human Experience: Who Am I?*, I am forced to be highly selective. Therefore, I adopted Chapter 8 from Monroe's *Journeys*, "Cause the Bible Tells Me So," for my freshman course because its provocative statements about prayer, heaven, hell, God, and reality challenge students' religiously and scientifically conservative paradigms.

Monroe's remarks in his later books, *Far Journeys* and *Ultimate Journey*, inform the earlier experiences on which he reports in Chapter 8. Of particular relevance is a series of "rings" that center on the earth; they are not actual places but what Monroe's biographer, Ronald Russell, calls "metaphors for states or phases of consciousness" (320). Monroe later called them focus levels, but that terminology is not part of the nomenclature of *Journeys*. Here in the rings and throughout Monroe's explorations out of the body, two principles stand out, and I take them as my thesis for this essay and about the nonphysical plane in general: thoughts are things, and like attracts like. My purpose in developing these points below is to suggest ways in which Monroe's Chapter 8 may be used to challenge students' religious and scientific fundamentalism by fostering critical thinking about metaphysical experiences. What follows should serve as a guide through Chapter 8 and as a resource for instructors who wish to include a brief but provocative metaphysical piece in their courses.

The elements of critical thinking provide a fitting place to begin a journey through Monroe's controversial text, and one may well want to ask students to run it through an apparatus such as Gerald M. Nosich maps out in *Learning To Think Things Through: A Guide to Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum*. Monroe's overall context is culture's pervasive religious ethos, of which even nonbelievers are aware. Monroe himself is such a person: as a child he had no heavy religious indoctrination but instead gained a left-brain practicality from his father and a right-brain sense of adventure and a fascination with the unknown from his mother (Russell 12 and 16). Since these secular qualities persisted throughout his life, his *point of view* is limited to that of a cultural observer and out-of-body explorer. He is not an actual practicing Christian or even a Bible reader, much less a biblical scholar. The *question at issue is the following*: Do Monroe's out-of-body experiences enable a critique of popular religious *concepts*—prayer, God, heaven, and hell? In response, his *position* is that the spiritual universe is much different than religion and the Bible have traditionally stressed, though the text does not document the criticism. In taking this position, he seems unaware that what he considers straightforward *information* may, to a skeptical reader, be unproven *assumptions*. For example, he believes that his understanding of religion and of the Bible is sufficiently extensive, that he actually journeys out of his body and does not just imagine events (they are extraspychic rather than intrapsychic), that these journeys take place in what he calls Locale I (the physical world) and Locale II (the nonphysical or spirit world), and that his experiences are sufficiently objective and important to merit widespread dissemination. The *conclusions and interpretations* that follow are wide-ranging: thoughts are things, which means that they have the power to manifest; like attracts like; prayer is open to question and probably ineffective; children may be naturally psychic; heaven and hell are constructs of human thought; God is omnipotent but indifferent; reality is malleable; human beings are much more than their physical bodies; and our spiritual essence may even be extraterrestrial. The *implications* that spin off from these conclusions are equally staggering: human beings are more than physical bodies; we are, in

fact, spiritual beings having an earthly, human experience; and everyone has the potential for some degree of the out-of-body travel on which Monroe reports (*Journeys* includes a how-to Appendix).

As analysis by the elements suggests, there are indeed things in Monroe's belief system that students with fundamentalist religious leanings can embrace: human beings have souls that survive physical death, heaven and hell are possible afterlife states, pure thoughts are beneficial, and one should enjoy life but not become addicted to earthly things (*carpe diem* versus *contemptus mundi*). But in Monroe's writings, there is no definite role for the Bible or for Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, though both hover in the background—an absent presence—because the title of Chapter 8 alludes to a children's song: "Jesus loves me! this I know, / For the Bible tells me so." The omission of anything biblical in a chapter so named is particularly ironic because Paul's statements would support the objective reality of Monroe's experiences. "There are celestial bodies," Paul writes, "and there are terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. ... If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body" (I Corinthians 15: 40, 44). In a later passage, he describes in third person what appears to be his own out-of-body experience:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. (II Corinthians 12:2-4)

Monroe implies that "Cause the Bible Tells Me So" is an insufficient reason to embrace traditional mainstream religious notions and to deny such experiences as his own; but the Bible, besides including a wide variety of paranormal experiences, explicitly supports his assumption that there is a second body and that it can project out of the physical body, have experiences, and return to tell the tale. This omission of relevant biblical material signals rank ignorance. But how can Christian students affirm biblical inerrancy; acknowledge such "gifts" of the Spirit as healing, miracles, and prophecy (I Corinthians 12:4-11); yet cherry pick the biblical text to exclude Paul's direct affirmation of out-of-body experience? Suddenly believing what they believe just because "the Bible says so" starts to unravel.

Despite this overlooked similarity, there is much in Chapter 8 that will rattle students' conservative religiosity and scientific materialism. First, for Monroe, out-of-body travel enables one to experience the spirit world firsthand. Second, an afterlife in "heaven" (whatever that may be) does not follow from being saved by grace through faith, as in the Protestant understanding of salvation, but instead merely requires loving, temperate thoughts. And third, traditional Christianity's solid grounding in religious ritual is usually stifling and devoid of meaning. This critique comes through most powerfully in Monroe's problematic critique of prayer, which opens Chapter 8:

Let's start with prayer, which is supposed to be a direct communication with God. As we are taught to pray today, it is as if a chemical formula is recited without any knowledge of the original intent or meaning of the ingredients. ... Somewhere, someone knew how to pray. He tried to teach others. A few

learned the methodology. Others absorbed only the words, and the words themselves became altered and changed over the years. Gradually, the technique was lost, until accidentally (?) rediscovered periodically through the ages. In the latter cases, only rarely has the rediscoverer been able to convince others that the Old, Established Way is not quite right. (JOOB 116-17)

Although the passage is critical of the kind of prayer that Christian students have learned to practice, Monroe hardly condemns genuine prayer. He merely suggests that it is subject to kenosis when it becomes ritualized in an institution. *Somewhere, someone knew how to pray. ... Gradually, the technique was lost....* Chapter 8 goes on to record Monroe's own experience with ineffectual prayer. While out-of-body, he "ram[s] into a solid wall of some impenetrable material," which prevents him from returning to his physical body. He tries "every prayer I had ever learned, and made up a few special ones. And I meant every word more than I had ever meant anything in my life" (117). Nothing happens. After he recalls a nearly fatal spin in an aircraft, which he survived by doing the counterintuitive thing, his reason tells him to do something similarly counterintuitive—not to find a way around or through the wall but to turn around and travel in the opposite direction—and it works. From this experience arise various questions that can fuel a discussion with students. If thoughts are things, why do Monroe's prayers not work? Do we conclude that he knew how to pray the right way, that prayer did not work, and therefore that prayer is a hollow ritual, which seems to contradict thoughts-as-things? Do we conclude that he prayed in the way that he criticizes, that his prayers naturally did not work, and therefore that prayer's efficacy is still an open question? Did his prayers yield the correct rational response that got him home? Or does that possibility incorrectly attribute causality to chronology—a *post hoc* fallacy?

Another episode that involves prayer follows Monroe's terrifying experience with the "solid wall" when he is astral projecting in the home of his brother's family. Tormenting beings pull at him and berate him for his attempts to pray ("Listen to him pray to his gods,' one chuckled, most contemptuously" [119]); but when he becomes angry and pushes back, he reenters his body safely and hears "a child crying" in the next room. Although the girl's mother assumes the problem to be a bad dream, Monroe writes, "Was my niece's trancelike nightmare a coincidence? Or perhaps some new praying technique is needed on my part" (119-20). He implies that the little girl may have perceived Monroe's struggle with his tormentors, but he does not ask the questions that a critical reader should consider. Why was the little girl the only person who had a nightmare at that particular moment? Were the tormenting beings there to assail the little girl, Monroe, or both of them? Does she—do children—have natural psychic abilities that wane with age and acculturation? And can the thoughts that one experiences in nightmares sometimes be more than intrapsychic events—are nightmares "things" in the sense that they involve events outside the physical body?

After the two stories that convey Monroe's dubious attitude toward prayer, the longer middle part of Chapter 8 discusses "heaven" and "hell." Just across the border from the nonphysical world, he finds a "'layer'" (JOOB 120) that is reminiscent of damnation. He writes in Chapter 8, "It seems to be the part of Locale II closest to Here-Now, and in some way most related. It is a gray-black hungry ocean where the slightest motion attracts nibbling and tormenting beings. ... Could this be the borders of hell?" (JOOB 120-21). Monroe's early explorations also include an

experience that corresponds to stereotypical notions of heaven. He encounters “pure peace”; exquisite emotions, particularly love and joy; warm clouds; and pleasing colors, music, and shapes. He has the sense that this is “Home,” and he writes:

Each of the three times I went There, I did not return voluntarily. I came back sadly, reluctantly. Someone helped me return. Each time after I returned, I suffered intense nostalgia and loneliness for days. I felt as an alien might among strangers in a land where things were not “right,” where everything and everyone was so different and so “wrong” when compared with where you belonged. Acute loneliness, nostalgia, and something akin to homesickness. So great was it that I have not tried to go There again. Was this heaven? (JOOB 123-25).

Monroe’s early experiences lacked the benefit of his later discoveries, which led to a fairly comprehensive cosmology that provides a context for “heaven” and “hell” in Chapter 8. To begin with, he calls earth a “Human School of Compressed Learning,” which, “for all its shortcomings, is an exquisite teaching machine” (FJ 257 and UJ 83). What is it that we are supposed to learn? Monroe’s answer is love. And in order to maximize the human experience, we must embrace the time-space illusion as truth and accept “[t]he blanking or sublimation of previous experience” (FJ 249). In other words, we have to affirm life in the temporal-physical realm as real, and we must forget that we have had previous lifetimes as well as experiences in the nonphysical world *in between* lifetimes. But such information is embedded in the subconscious and can be accessed in altered states through meditation, particularly with the aid of Hemispheric Synchronization, “an auditory-guidance system” involving “binaural-beat technology,” which Monroe “developed and patented” (Atwater 357). Hemi-Sync® enables conscious experience of brain wave states usually experienced only in sleep. (For a fuller discussion of how it works, see F. Holmes Atwater’s paper in the Appendix of Russell’s biography [357-68] and Maureen Caudill’s explanation in *Suddenly Psychic* [14-18].)

When asked the purpose of this physical human life, Monroe replied without hesitation. “The purpose of life,” he reportedly said, “is to realize that thoughts are things.” As I like to tell my students, he means that thoughts are *energetic* things that can *manifest* and *travel*. Throughout his three books, he stresses that as we *think*, so will we also *be*—a version of the “Law of Attraction” popularized by the recent film *The Secret*, which argues that the power of thought, combined with desire, imagination, and gratitude, can make wishes manifest. A rhyme often heard in New Age churches states the principle this way: “Thoughts held in mind produce after their kind.” In a more extended articulation, thoughts beget words, words inspire actions, actions become habits, habits determine character, character is destiny, and destiny culminates in a place in the afterlife that matches the nature of one’s original thoughts. As Monroe would suggest, those who want to have a happy afterlife should be really careful about what they think, for every thought is a prayer in the highly effective sense that he sets out to deny. The irony mounts: thoughts are things; prayers are thoughts; but contemporary prayer, for Monroe, is merely a hollow ritual. Somehow the most fervent kind of thought is insignificant, while a stray thought is rife with power and implication.

Monroe articulates the latter point, along with the linkage between thoughts and one’s place in the nonphysical universe, in the following passage from Chapter 8:

In these worlds where thoughts are not only things, but are everything, including you, your poison or your perfection is of your own making. ... Your destination in the heaven or hell of Locale II seems to be grounded completely within the framework of your deepest *constant* (and perhaps non-conscious) motivations, emotions, and personality drives. ... The least stray desire at the wrong time, or a deep-seated emotion I wasn't aware of, diverts my trip in that "like" direction. (JOOB 121)

As he puts it earlier, "As Human Minds, we are what we think"; "thought is the wellspring of existence"; "As you think, so you are"; and "Like attracts like." He also states: "In Locale II, reality is composed of deepest desires and most frank fears. Thought is action, and no hiding layers of conditioning or inhibition shield the inner you from others, where honesty is the best policy because there can be nothing less" (JOOB 71, 74, 75, and 77).

What gives Monroe's notion of thoughts as things credibility is that it is essentially the same position taken by others who achieved the out-of-body state. Here are a couple of statements by other writers—one famous, one not widely known. Emanuel Swedenborg writes in *Heaven and Hell*:

That man is a spirit as to his interiors, may be evident from this, that after the body is separated, which takes place when he dies, the man still lives. ... When we say that man is a spirit as to his interiors, we mean, as to those things which are of his thought and will, for these are the interiors themselves, which cause man to be man, and as his interiors are, such is the man. (qtd. in Van Dusen 72)

Similarly, Preston Dennett, in his book *Out-of-Body Exploring: A Beginner's Approach*, emphasizes the importance of thoughts as things in the nonphysical realm by stating: "The experience [creating objects during an OBE] proved to me that the astral plane is composed of a material that responds to our thoughts. This is why the occultists are so fond of saying that 'thoughts are things'" (45). Later he remarks:

I used to think of the astral world as being made up of only energy. This may be true, but I am continually surprised by how *physical* events feel. In the astral world, we are able to duplicate any experience we have on earth. The material of the astral world seems to conform to our thoughts, and we create and project utterly convincing environments. (50)

Monroe discovers, in the nonphysical world, that "thoughts are things" and "like attracts like" are organizing principles. Specifically, around the physical earth are a series of "recycling rings" or "human energy rings" or "semitransparent radiant globes" (FJ 94 and 101; UJ 32). He means that these concentric spheres are where souls go before they recycle back into the physical, each ring containing a collection of souls who share the same "frequencies" or thought patterns (FJ 64). His metaphor for this metaphorical ring system is the "Interstate" because he perceives it to be "a major highway into the Unknown" (UJ 110). The "entry ramps" are physical death (UJ 228); there are "exit ramps" for the various soul states (UJ 126 and 202-3); there are "highways and byways" (UJ 14); and he eventually discovers "a bridge or bypass over ... [the dangerous] areas—with Caution signs posted along the way" (UJ 124).

(Patricia Leva furthers the Interstate metaphor in her volume *Traveling the Interstate of Consciousness: A Driver's Instruction Manual*, for those who want to take the metaphor further.)

Monroe understands these rings to have a coherent pattern. Halfway out is what he calls the “null point” (FJ 199), a sort of dividing line between souls for whom the time-space illusion is foremost and souls for whom nonphysical reality is the primary construct. The closer to the earth a ring appears, the more temporal-spatial its inhabitants will be, and the sooner they will reincarnate; the further beyond the null point, the more *nontemporal*-spatial the inhabitants will be, and the longer they remain before reincarnation. The individual rings, though not infinite, expand to accommodate different types of human experience. Again, thoughts are things: as new thoughts arise, they are accommodated in the afterlife.

A few examples will illustrate the organization just sketched. The innermost ring is for souls who do not realize that they are no longer physically alive. They therefore attempt to participate in physical life without success; they are “totally and compulsively bonded to time-space materiality,” with “extreme distortions of the original survival imprint” (FJ 239-40). One may rightly assume that such souls are sometimes perceived as ghosts. Closely akin to these sorry souls are those who know that they are dead but who remain addicted to the physical and are unaware of other possibilities; this area includes those whom Monroe calls “Wild Ones,” souls who assume that, because they are dead, their bad behavior no longer matters (FJ 240). The best example is analogous to the second circle of Dante’s *Inferno*. Monroe calls it the Flesh Pile, a “huge mass of ex-physical humans, [who are] writhing and struggling in an endless [futile] attempt to have sex with one another” (UJ 128). They are so addicted to sex that they are undeterred by lack of copulative success and “unaware of any other existence” (FJ 89); he cannot even get their attention.

Out from there, Monroe found the largest ring, which contains what he calls the Belief System Territories. I want to pause on that concept and provide some examples relevant to Chapter 8 because this is where “heaven” and “hell” are located in the Monroe cosmology (FJ 245; Russell 312). The Belief System Territories are an area with as many “exit ramps” as there are addictive human beliefs. The area is for those who know that they are dead but who are unable to transcend particular thought patterns. Remember: thoughts are things, and like attracts like. Monroe writes of the inhabitants, “*Their belief system is all they have to go on. So they go where they think there is some kind of security*” (UJ 175; Monroe’s emphasis here and below). Judgment means going where one belongs. For example, a belief system territory is where you go to be with those who share the same dogmatic religious beliefs, a potentially offensive notion to religiously fundamentalist students. In such a region, a female soul calls the astrally projected Monroe “*spawn of the devil*” (FJ 195); and another female remarks, “*Our minister says there is no such person as a visitor here*” (FJ 199). He also encounters a male soul who is slightly more self-aware and who has the opposite view of earthly religion: “*Nobody told me it was going to be like this! Those bastards yelling and screaming about gates of heaven, hellfire and damnation—they didn’t know what they were talking about!*” (UJ 121). Nonetheless, it is probably here in the Belief System Territories that Monroe encounters something that reminds him of common preconceptions of heaven: an experience of “*indescribable joy*” so intense that his guide has to shield him from it (FJ 179).

There are three rings beyond the Belief System Territories. The next one is for “*Fantasy Land*” or “The Park” (*FJ* 196; *UJ* 237), an area that other authors sometimes call “Summerland.” Monroe writes, “It was a place to calm down in after the trauma of physical death—a way station, for relaxation and decision as to what to do next” (*UJ* 237). As in the Belief System Territories, thoughts are things: the Park is a “human creation” (*UJ* 238). Here you can do whatever you want, provided that you do not violate anyone else’s free will. Beyond the Park is a ring for “Last-Timers” who await their final incarnation. And beyond that are the “I-There” clusters—soul groups “containing all [of one’s] previous and present lifetimes” (*UJ* 139), which await the return of their individual parts. Eventually Monroe discovers that he is a probe or scout sent from his soul cluster to play a crucial role in its development.

Earlier I referred to the Flesh Pile—the greatest hell in Monroe’s works—as Dantesque; but that is only partly correct. In the rings as in the *Inferno*, thoughts are things; but in Monroe’s cosmology progress is possible because thoughts can be dynamic. As souls become “hooked” (*FJ* 142) on the earth experience, they drop to a lower ring with each incarnation, but there is also upward progress even in the afterlife. A terrific example comes not from Monroe but from a student of his system of meditation named Bruce Moen whose book *Voyage Beyond Doubt* contains a chapter entitled “Max’s Hell.” In life, Max was “a mean-spirited, gifted, emotional sadist,” who now inhabits “a Hell made to order for him. Everyone living there with him, every man, woman, and child, had the same emotionally sadistic nature he did!” (87-88). Like attracts like. He is now trapped in “a vicious circle of sadism” (91), which he both inflicts and suffers. But thoughts are things: “If he ever begins to question his choice of beliefs,” writes Moen, “it will be the beginning of leaving his Hell. ...he’ll be pushed out of his Hell by a repulsive force” (89-90).

The I-There cluster’s short-term goal is to recover errant probes like Max, but its long-term objective is to achieve “escape velocity” (*FJ* 246)—that is, to acquire enough experience and love energy to escape the addictive gravity of the Human Compressed Learning System. (The metaphor has shifted from geometry to driving to rocketry, complete with “lift-off points” [*FJ* 261]). Then souls just disappear, which may be what Monroe observes in Chapter 8:

At the Signal [“almost like heraldic trumpets”], each living [*sic*] thing lies down—my impression is on their backs, bodies arched to expose the abdomen...with head turned to one side so that one does not see Him as He passes by. The purpose seems to be to form a living road over which He can travel. I have gleaned the idea that occasionally He will select someone from this living bridge, and that person is never seen or heard from again. ...As He passes, there is a roaring musical sound and a feeling of radiant, irresistible living force of ultimate power that peaks overhead and fades in the distance. ... Is this God? Or God’s son? Or His representative? (*JOOB* 122-23)

Because Monroe marvels at this powerful entity but does not take a stand, the passage invites discussion. Students will wonder what actually happens and whether there is a role for thoughts in a soul’s disappearance. It may be that thoughts have sufficiently matured to prepare a soul for another lifetime on earth, incarnation in another planet’s learning system, the departure of the I-There cluster, a higher realm of spiritual experience, or surrender of individual consciousness in union with the Godhead (*JOOB* 122).

The final metaphorical pieces of the Monroe cosmology—metaphorical because language can only indirectly capture the essence of ineffable experience in the nonphysical world—lie beyond the I-There clusters: an “Aperture,” through which one enters and exits the Earth Learning System; and an “Emitter,” the energy source that creates the hologram or dream in which we live (*UJ* 215-16 and 219). The Creator, whose existence Monroe affirms, lies beyond Aperture and Emitter (*UJ* 224) but is not the God of Sunday school lessons, much less Jesus the Christ.

The journey just charted, from earth to infinity, includes one of the states that Monroe mentions in Chapter 8: the terror of demons or demon-like beings that try to gnaw at him. Just as the Flesh Pile is a perversion of the survival instinct, the gnawing demons are perversions of the predatory instinct; indeed he proposes a “predator theory” of earthly life (Russell 287). Howard Storm’s near-death experience, which he records in *My Descent into Death and the Message of Love Which Brought Me Back*, provides a helpful gloss on Monroe’s text. Storm writes:

Now I was being forced by a mob of unfeeling people toward some unknown destination in the encroaching darkness. They began shouting and hurling insults at me, demanding that I hurry along. The more miserable I became, the more enjoyment they derived from my distress. ... The hopelessness of my situation overwhelmed me. I told them I would go no further, to leave me alone, and that they were liars. I could feel their breath on me as they shouted and snarled insults. They began to push and shove me about. I began to fight back. A wild frenzy of taunting, screaming, and hitting ensued. ... These creatures were once human beings. The best way I can describe them is to think of the worst imaginable person stripped of every impulse of compassion. (19-20)

Storm encounters Monroe’s “nibbling and tormenting beings” (*JOOB* 120) in an area of the Interstate that Monroe eventually learns to pass through unimpeded and quickly as if on the previously mentioned “bridge.” Again, thoughts are things, and like attracts like: Storm experiences such negativity because he lived a life of bottled-up anger, “[d]evoid of love, hope, and faith” and centered on self-interest. He writes, “It dawned on me that I was not unlike these miserable creatures that had tormented me” (26).

Unlike the gnawing hell, Monroe’s experience of Home may not be anywhere within the nonphysical part of the Earth Learning System at all. What he does not understand when he writes his first book is that Home is his extra-terrestrial—and nonphysical—point of origin, which he arbitrarily calls KT-95. Apparently his spiritual essence is *nonhuman*. When he later returns to Home he discovers why he left in the first place: the clouds, the music, the colors—everything is on “a repeating loop” (*UJ* 26). He left Home prior to his many physical earth incarnations because of curiosity to experience something new. He now realizes that he does not belong there because there is “no growth, nothing new to learn or experience” (*UJ* 30). Home is “a blind alley” (*UJ* 209).

To sum up, Monroe’s experiences of gnawing beings and of Home in Chapter 8 seem to take place outside the Belief System Territories, where he later came to locate heaven and hell: the

gnawing beings are close to the earth, and Home is extraterrestrial. Only the heaven-like place of “indescribable joy” may be part of a belief system.

Chapter 8 concludes with Monroe’s admission that he misremembers “as a child swimming in a pool that had underwater deep-hued colored lights set in the wall.” He tries to recreate the effect in his “country home” but later discovers, upon visiting “the site of my childhood that the pool had no colored lights under water.” The chapter’s last word is “Reality, Reality!” (*JOOB* 126). Thus a segment critical of prayer and heavily laden with eschatological speculation ends not with more of the same but on a lighthearted note that suggests an important question. If thoughts are things, then is reality malleable, and may even an incorrect memory be true in some sense?

The intellectual journey on which Monroe takes the reader is enough to challenge students’ fundamentalist preconceptions (whether these be religious or scientific), and the system that he maps out yields various implications that push beyond those in our earlier analysis by the elements. Perhaps his most important statement concerns the following “Known Basic” (i.e., fundamental insight) for which he searches in *Ultimate Journey*: “The physical universe, including the whole of humankind, is an ongoing creative process. There is indeed a Creator” (*UJ* 224). Because humans are co-creators, growth is possible—not just through physical incarnation or reincarnation but also through progress in the afterlife, which is why Monroe created a soul retrieval course called “Lifeline” at his institute for those who would like to assist nonphysical guides in helping souls make their transitions or move to a higher ring. In the nonphysical world, thoughts attract like thoughts; as Monroe’s experiences suggest, we will end up in a ring that resonates with our thoughts and desires in life. As we work toward a metaphorical “graduation” from the Earth Learning System, then, it is helpful to remember that the notion of thoughts as things is both a caveat and an opportunity. Monroe states, “The idea that every thought I may have that is tinged with emotion radiates uncontrolled outward to others is heavy with implication” (*UJ* 189). Even if fundamentalists of one stripe or another do not accept out-of-body travel and the cosmology that he claims to have discovered, Chapter 8’s emphasis on thoughts as things still provides an important insight into human psychology. Elsewhere in *Journeys*, Monroe can relate to the doubtful reader because he is a doubtful writer, engaged in his own ontological struggles, who relies on reason to figure out whether what is happening to him is more than psychological. This agonizing attempt to remain objective in the face of fantastic experiences partly accounts for the book’s enduring appeal and its relevance in the university classroom. Since Monroe considers the development of an analytical mind to be one of our greatest goals in life, he ultimately encourages skeptics such as he was to seek answers for themselves.

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